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RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2024
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN THAILAND: A TRIP TO THE QUEEN'S PROJECTS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James F. Entwistle, reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: During a one-day visit to southern Thailand Poloff and Army Attache saw two villages in Pattani and Narathiwat provinces the Queen's project is building in an attempt to provide family members of victims of the southern violence and teachers in the South with safe places to live. The visit to these villages, as well as to a Buddhist village surrounded by Muslim communities, gave a sense that the Thai government will not soon put down the insurgency and that local people in particularly "hot" areas are dependent on RTG protection to go about their daily business. The visit unexpectedly became a minor part of a series of ceremonies during which a Thai businessman provided amulets to teachers and other government officials in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala provinces. End summary.

12. (U) On November 26 Poloff and the Army Attache accompanied General Naphon Boontub, Aide-de-Camp to Queen Sirikit, on a visit to projects funded by the Queen in Narathiwat and Pattani provinces. The Queen has funded Ban Rotan Batu, a village for widows of victims of the southern violence, and a teachers village for teachers from throughout Thailand who volunteer to teach in the South.

WIDOWS VILLAGE CLOSE TO SELF-SUFFICIENT

13. (U) We were greeted on our arrival at the widows village in Narathiwat by Buddhist teachers from throughout the province and by residents of the village. Neat rows of homes and small agricultural plots cover most of the village, which is located approximately sixteen kilometers from Narathiwat city. Queen Sirikit began funding the widows village in 2004 and now approximately 150 families live in an area of about 300 acres. The Queen created the village to provide a means of making a living to families who have lost family members in the southern insurgency. The advanced state of development of the village was noticeable on arrival as the two-story concrete homes contrasted with the typical one-story wood construction found in many rural Thai areas. General Naphon said that population of the village was split almost evenly between Buddhists and Muslims who live together peacefully.

14. (U) Villagers raise fish, chicken and ducks, in addition to growing rice and other crops. In addition to promoting King Bhumibol's theory of sufficiency farming, the village project also offers residents training in arts and crafts so that the villagers can produce ceramics and other items for sale in Bangkok. The village was not yet complete as there were no schools, recreational facilities such, or library.

THE BUDDHISTS' LAST STAND

15. (C) We unexpectedly visited a village of fifty-eight families in Narathiwat's Cho-airong District that General Naphon described as the last stand of Buddhist people in rural, southern Narathiwat. Muslim communities encircle the village because other Buddhists who had lived in surrounding areas had moved away, Naphon said. The villagers practice sufficiency farming methods and produce vegetables and fish for sale in a local market.

16. (U) The villagers hastily assembled to greet Naphon on our arrival and we readily observed the effects of the southern violence. Two of the women we met had been injured in bombings while selling produce at a market outside the village. One woman had lost a leg while another had lost most of her fingers on her right hand the week before our visit. The second woman had returned to the village from a local hospital the day before we visited and she had to be summoned to come back from the same market where she had been injured and now was back selling produce. Some of the children who were too young to go to a school within the village showed signs of malnutrition, a condition not often found in Thailand. Naphon said he decided to make the surprise visit in order to lift the spirits of the villagers

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and to let them know that they had not been forgotten by the Queen.

TEACHERS VILLAGE SPRINGING UP

17. (U) General Naphon said Queen Sirikit plans to fund teachers villages in each of the three southern Thai provinces that are affected by the insurgency. The villages would provide teachers and their families with houses and the teachers would commute to schools throughout the province from the teachers village if the security situation provided for safe travel. If the security situation did not allow for safe travel, teachers would stay at the school where they teach during the week and travel back to the village to be with their families during the weekend.

18. (U) The first village is under construction in the Pulo Puyo subdistrict of Nong Chik District in Pattani. General (Ret.) Thirapongse Sriwatanakul, head of the Queen's projects in Pattani, said the village currently has 120 acres of land and the Queen's project foundation is negotiating to purchase an additional 300 acres of adjacent land from a landowner who fled the South due to the violence. Negotiations were difficult, Thirapongse said, because Malaysian businesspeople were trying to purchase land throughout the South. Local contractors were in the process of constructing homes and the Queen intends for the village to be fully self-sufficient. The village would provide everything needed by the teachers as food would be grown on land within village limits and all facilities would be available including a library, a gymnasium, housing for workers at the village, and a school.

PROTECTION AMULETS FOR SOUTHERN BUDDHISTS

19. (U) A surprise addition to our visit was a Thai businessman who traveled with Naphon in order to provide amulets to Buddhist teachers, government officials, members of the security forces, and villagers who gathered to meet

the Queen's aide during our visit. Many Thai Buddhists believe that amulets can protect the wearer from violence and those who gathered at the villages in Narathiwat and Pattani as well as the Fifteenth Army Division base in Pattani and the Yala police headquarters eagerly lined up to receive the amulets.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) The effects of the violence in southern Thailand on local people were readily evident and quite moving during the visit to the South. With the insurgency's impact on Thai people so sobering, the intention of the Queen's projects to provide safe havens within the South may reflect a view within the Royal family that the Thai government will not soon solve the southern insurgency. The teachers villages, however, could have a positive impact if the project is able to help keep schools open in the South.

BOYCE